

THE SCHOOL DENTIST

A Family Dentist for Your School

Tuesday, October 15, 2013
House Health Policy Standing Committee Meeting

Subject: HOUSE BILL 4865 (2013)

Good Morning Ladies and Gentleman:

My Name is Dr. Melanie Sheils-Vergeldt. Prior to receiving my Doctorate in Dental Sciences from the University of Michigan in 1994, I practiced as a Registered Dental Hygienist and Registered Nurse in the State of Michigan. I am a member in good standing with the American Dental Association, the Michigan Dental Association and the Oakland County Dental Society. The School Dentist PC has been featured in each of their Journals frequently over the years.

The School Dentist and the School Dentist Smile Foundation, a non-profit entity, were created ten years ago to bring early detection, and preventive dental care to children in schools across the State of Michigan. The School Dentist has also volunteered its services as part of the American Dental Association's Annual Give Kids a Smile Event. The School Dentist Smile Foundation has been funded by the Delta Dental Foundation to help ensure that all children have the opportunity to be seen by a dentist.

I would like to address my concerns within House Bill 4865 (2013). This bill seeks to over regulate portable dentistry for public safety reasons. In my opinion, this bill is designed to reduce competition between portable dentists and traditional dental offices.

House Bill 4865 requires that the mobile dentist should either fix the teeth which are detected to have tooth decay, or provide the dentist who will do the restorative work. It is not reasonable or in the best interest of the children, to have their teeth anesthetized, drilled, filled, or extracted at school. Many dentists will not treat Medicaid recipients, and the parents cannot be forced to take their children to a dentist. To create a law requiring a preventative practice to do something impossible, will eliminate this valuable service.

Early dental detection and prevention for underserved children has been my primary focus. Many of the children seen have never been to the dentist. By providing a gateway to preventative care, in the safe and familiar school environment, this service ultimately reduces the burden on the Medicaid system, rather than costly and often painful treatment later.

This bill also prohibits the use of dental x-ray images by the mobile doctor providing early dental exams. Early detection is not possible without the dental x-rays which show tooth decay between teeth. Digital x-rays are easily reproduced and shared between dentists using email. It is unnecessary for any dentist to retake x-rays.

Some dentists do not want a visiting school dentist in their locale, possibly because their work may be viewed by another dentist. When evidence of dental overtreatment is discovered, the before and after dental radiographs are needed. (For Example, an 11 year old student was seen at the school visit and had one cavity which needed to be filled. The child was referred to a local dentist and six months later she returned to be seen again at the school with 16 large new fillings on many of her healthy, permanent teeth. Her custodial grandfather had taken her as recommended to the local dentist. The only way this overtreatment could be reported was to provide the before and after x-ray images). The school dentist has the ability to offer an unbiased diagnosis.

House Bill 4865 will over regulate this service and the restrictions it places will force The School Dentist and possibly other portable dentists out of business. Please vote against House Bill 4865. Its creation limits competition among dentists. Please make a decision which is in the best interest of those children who reside in the underserved areas of our State.

At the very least, consider a “grandfather” clause to allow existing portable dentists to continue to bring preventative dentistry (fluoride treatments, dental cleanings, sealants, examinations with required x-rays and education) to the children in Michigan schools, who otherwise might never receive preventative dental care.

Thank you for your consideration,

Melanie Sheils-Vergeldt, RDH, RN, DDS
The School Dentist